

The Connecticut General Assembly



This testimony, prepared for the Commerce Committee's public hearing February 5, 2009, is from Senator Andrea L Stillman (D-Waterford) and Representative Ted Moukawsher (D-Groton).

Senator LeBeau, Representative Berger, Ranking and other esteemed members of the Commerce Committee: We write seeking your careful review and favorable consideration of three bills before you today. We have every confidence—and sincerely hope you will come to agree—that these initiatives will help drive vital economic interests in southeastern Connecticut, create jobs and keep money circulating through the region, and generate a positive ripple effect on nearby and related businesses.

We support these bills with full knowledge of and concern for the state's budget turmoil, knowing the seed money we request will repay dividends that far exceed the state's investment, and with an idea the funding will actually accelerate the turnaround of our state's economic fortunes.

The first of these is **SB 252, An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for Capital Improvements to the Lyman Allyn Art Museum**. This 75-year old New London landmark is a Founding Member of the groundbreaking Connecticut Art Trail and has a permanent collection of some 10,000 paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures, and other pieces.

The museum's artistic focus is on American art from the 18th through 20th centuries and its outreach is undeniably community oriented. Much of its programming is directed at families; it regularly hosts classes, lectures, and other events to make it so much more than just a "museum."

Also, please know that other funding and support for the Lyman Allyn Art Museum is broad-based: It receives money from such sponsors as the Frank Loomis Palmer Fund and Pfizer, Inc. However, private contributions alone cannot—and frankly, will not—underwrite the much-needed capital improvements to be funded by this bill.

We also seek your support for **SB 253, An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for Capital Improvements to the Garde Arts Center**, also in New London. This facility provides a wide range of entertainment, ranging from popular Broadway shows to opera, and from film to other theater performances. The Garde hosts special performances for literally thousands of local school students in music, theater and dance. There are also year-round, extracurricular after-school and summer programs in the performing and visual arts for elementary, middle, and high school students.

But the Garde Arts Center complex is housed in downtown buildings from the 1920s and they are in dire need of wholesale improvements. The main building features an auditorium with seating for nearly 1,500 people; this is one of Connecticut's few remaining historic movie palaces from that golden age of

motion pictures and vaudeville. It is fair to say the Garde Arts Center is one of New London's cornerstones, a vital piece of the community's cultural heritage, and a destination that is helping New London grow as an increasingly popular destination for people from elsewhere, including passengers on the cruise ships that have been visiting with increased frequency.

Much of the work planned is a "shovel-ready" construction project that will generate an estimated 81 full-time jobs with a construction jobs economic impact of an estimated \$17.9 million. This construction would complete the final two phases of the Garde Master Plan formally approved by the State of Connecticut more than 15 years ago, in 1993.


The third piece of legislation we support is **HB 6101, An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for the Expansion of the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford**. This funding will allow for an expansion that will in turn provide for a new national educational initiative.


The O'Neill, as it is simply known in our part of the state, is named after a local icon and the nation's only Nobel Prize-winning playwright. It hosts six separate and renowned programs, attracting theater aficionados from across the country. In fact, between the staff and alumni of programs at The O'Neill, every major award in theater arts has a Waterford, Connecticut connection.

The O'Neill is situated on one of Connecticut's most glorious parcels of waterfront property, what had been the 95-acre Hammond Farm. It was founded nearly 45 years ago with the enthusiastic and expressed written support of Eugene O'Neill's widow, Carlotta Monterey O'Neill. We are confident that with approval of this legislation, Connecticut will make a wise investment in The O'Neill program, in this prime real estate, and in the legacy of one of our state's most talented and notable offspring.

With these three bills yes, there are jobs in the balance and a much-needed economic stimulus for a part of Connecticut that must be considered a jewel in the state's extensive treasure chest of historic attractions. We believe that with these initiatives, Connecticut will also help preserve the rich cultural tradition that literally defines Connecticut as much as any physical attribute.

Thank you very much for your kind consideration.


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